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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 003121

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR: EUR/WE (VAN CLEVE)

FROM EMBASSY VATICAN/MESSAGE NO. 85/001

E.O. 12958: DECL 06/07/11

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: BACKGROUND PAPER FOR PRESIDENTIAL VISIT: IRAQ

CLASSIFIED BY CDA JOSEPH MERANTE, REASONS E.O. 12958
1.5 (B), (D).

11. (C) BEGIN TEXT. THE VATICAN CONDEMNED THE WEST'S
PROSECUTION OF THE GULF WAR, AND IT HAS CONSISTENTLY
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OPPOSED U.S. SANCTIONS POLICY TOWARD IRAQ. WE SHOULD
EXPECT IT TO CONTINUE TO DO SO. MANY FACTORS ARE
INVOLVED IN THE VATICAN'S TOLERATION OF THE IRAQI
REGIME. THE MOST IMPORTANT ARE:

-- RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES/HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS: THE
VATICAN SEEKS TO TRANSLATE ITS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, AS
WELL AS ITS SINCERE HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS, INTO
CONCRETE POLICY. ITS NON-CONFRONTATIONAL POLICY TOWARD
IRAQ IS PARTIALLY BASED ON ITS CONVICTION THAT THE
ECONOMIC EMBARGO IS SEVERELY IMPACTING THE PEOPLE OF
IRAQ. TO COUNTER THIS BELIEF, CREDIBLE ARGUMENTS MUST
BE MADE THAT THE EMBARGO IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE
HARDSHIP BEING EXPERIENCED BY THE IRAQI PEOPLE;

-- NATIONAL SELF-INTEREST: THE VATICAN LABORS TO
PROTECT CATHOLICS AROUND THE WORLD. ITS CONSISTENT
SUPPORT OF SADDAM HUSSEIN PARTIALLY RESULTS FROM ITS
DESIRE TO PROTECT THE 600,000 IRAQI CATHOLICS FROM
ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM. THE VATICAN HAS CONSISTENTLY
TOLD US THAT, IN ITS VIEW, THE STATE OF RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM IN IRAQ IS BETTER THAN IN MANY OTHER ARAB
COUNTRIES. IN THE VATICAN'S VIEW, THE LIKELY
ALTERNATIVE TO SADDAM WOULD BE AN ISLAMIC GOVERNMENT.
FOR THE VATICAN, A SECULAR DICTATORSHIP IS MUCH
PREFERABLE TO AN ISLAMIC ONE. (NOTE: 600,00 IRAQI'S
BELONG TO THE CHALDEAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. THIS CHURCH
IS IN FULL COMMUNION WITH ROME, ALTHOUGH IT RETAINS
RITES, TRADITIONS, AND DISCIPLINE WHICH ARE
SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT FROM ROMAN CATHOLICISM).

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--RELIGIOUS MANEUVERING: THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IS
CLOSE TO SIGNING AN AGREEMENT WITH THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH
OF THE EAST ON REUNIFICATION WITH ROME. (NOTE: THE
ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST IS AN ANCIENT CHURCH WHICH
BROKE WITH THE REST OF WORLD CHRISTENDOM IN THE 4TH
CENTURY). THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST IS CENTERED
IN IRAQ, AND AS A CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION PREFERS
SADDAM HUSSEIN TO AN ISLAMICIST LEADER. THE VATICAN
IS VERY SENSITIVE AT THIS POINT TO AVOID TAKING
POSITIONS WHICH WOULD ALIENATE THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH.

-- PERSONAL DESIRES OF JOHN PAUL II: THERE ARE THREE
MAJOR TRIPS WHICH THE POPE HAS EXPRESSED A DESIRE TO
COMPLETE BEFORE HIS HEALTH FURTHER DETERIORATES--
RUSSIA, CHINA, IRAQ. PLANS FOR THE POPE TO VISIT THE
SITE OF ABRAHAM'S BIRTH IN UR (IRAQ) WERE CALLED OFF
IN 2000. THE POPE STILL HARBORS A DESIRE TO PRAY AT
THIS SITE. THIS PAPAL DESIRE IS ANOTHER REASON WHY
THE VATICAN WISHES TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH
IRAQ.

12. (C) CONCLUSION: UNLESS SADDAM'S HUMAN RIGHTS
ABUSES INCREASE SUBSTANTIALLY, AND DIRECTLY IMPACT THE
IRAQI CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE
VATICAN WILL CHANGE ITS POSITION ON IRAQ. IT IS
IMPORTANT THAT WE CONTINUE TO BRIEF THE VATICAN ON
CONTINUED IRAQI ABUSES, AND TO PROVIDE CREDIBLE
EVIDENCE OF SADDAM HUSSEIN'S MALEVOLENT INTENT AGAINST
NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES.
MERANTE

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